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Regional languages holding their own in Wallonia

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By The Brussels Times with Belga

Credit: Belga

Endogenous regional languages (ERLs) are almost as widely spoken and understood in Wallonia as they were 30 years ago, according to a study unveiled on Thursday by the Endogenous Regional Languages Service.

The last studies on the question of the vitality of endogenous regional languages date back to the 1980s and 1990s. A quantitative survey was therefore conducted among a representative sample of 4,800 French-speaking Walloons on the Internet and by telephone.

The study was conducted between 29 November 2021 and 14 April 2022, in collaboration with the Research Directorate of the General Secretariat of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, the Observatory of Cultural Policies and the Walloon Institute of Statistics (Iweps).

In particular, citizens were asked which ERLs they knew or practiced, their sense of belonging to the Walloon identity or their region, and their desire to learn these languages. They then did a practical exercise in translating terms from the various dialects.

Almost 93% of respondents said they knew Walloon existed, but only about a quarter of them scored at least 5/10 in the translation test. The most recent studies indicated 30 to 40% of speakers of an ERL thirty years ago, while almost three out of 10 respondents obtained a minimum score of 5/10 in the translations offered in various languages.

This “seems rather encouraging in terms of vitality,” the study noted.

It also pointed out that younger respondents reported a better understanding of an ERL, whereas the average translation scores increased with age.

Finally, the study showed that the family was still the preferred medium for learning a regional language.

Almost one in three respondents said they were willing to take ERL lessons.